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ABSTRACT

"Work Keys" is a comprehensive program for assessing and teaching workplace skills. This serial "special issue" features 18 first-hand reports on Work Keys projects in action in states across North America. They show how the Work Keys is helping businesses and educators solve the challenge of building a world-class work force. The reports are as follows: "Liberty Check Printers Prepares for the Future" (Paul Annett); "Schools Seek Curriculum, Skills Match" (newspaper reprint) on the Duval County, Florida, program; "Bay Area To Use Work Keys for Workforce Development" (Gerald Bartlett); "Work Keys Helps Carbone of America Comply with QS [Quality Standards] 9000 Standards" in Farmville, Virginia; "Flour City Packaging Focuses on a Workforce Development Program" in Minnesota; "Iowa Workforce Development's Work Keys Profilers Receive International Award" (Sharon Dralle); "McHenry County Unlocks the Door to Qualified Workers" in Illinois (Ginger Knapp); "Growing a Regional Work Keys Program in Southwestern Pennsylvania" (Bob Dove); "Pine Technical College's Work Keys Service Center is Growing to Serve Area Business" in Minnesota (Howie Anderson); "ICI Polyester and John Tyler Community College Launch Model Employee Development Program" in Hopewell, Virginia; "Polaris Industries Committed to Excellence" in Osceola, Wisconsin (Mary Zins); "Work Keys a Graduation Requirement for Wichita Public Schools" (H. Guy Glidden); "Work Keys Heads North: Canadian Colleges Become Work Keys Service Centers"; "Retention Rates Are High for Workers Hired through Ontario Work Keys Program"; "Work Keys Builds Virginia's Workforce"; "Texas Workforce Center Meets Needs of Area Job Seekers and Employers" (Shu-Ching Chen); "The Greater Washington Board of Trade Undertakes a Workforce Availability Project"; and "'Filling in the Gaps': Design and Delivery of Work Keys-Based Training Programs" in Phoenix, Arizona. (YLB)

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WORK KEYS USA

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Liberty Check Printers Prepares for the Future

Liberty Check Printers was established in 1986 and is a leading check printer and service provider for credit unions. The company is headquartered in Roseville, Minnesota, and has production plants in Mounds View, Minnesota; Knoxville, Tennessee; Madison, Wisconsin; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Simi Valley, California; and Dallas, Texas. Approximately 250 employees work at the production plants, performing a variety of jobs including Customer Care, Order Processing, Production Specialist, and Press Operator.

Advancements in technology and changes in the check printing industry are requiring a higher skill set, which means employees will need additional training. In 1996, Paul Annett, Executive Vice President of Administration, and Bob Kerner, National Operations Director, were asked to conduct a Liberty Workforce 2000 analysis. A thorough study was completed on research which predicts work skills employees will need in the future. The study resulted in six "core skills" being identified. These skills were math, reading, listening, basic computer use, teamwork, and problem solving.

After identifying these core skills, Liberty learned of the Work Keys skills assessment produced by ACT. The Work Keys skills assessment was such a good match to the Workforce 2000 findings that the decision was made to use it to assess and plan for the development of our Operations employees. In addition, the ACT name, legal validation, and national implementation trend made Work Keys an even more attractive option for Liberty. The company then selected Pine Technical College as their business partner and Work Keys service center. Their experience, "get it done" attitude, and compatibility with the Liberty culture made Pine Technical College an easy choice.

In September 1996, Paul Annett and Mike Provenzano, Executive Vice President of Operations & Technology, communicated the importance and challenges of change. Jobs were profiled in October and Carrie Krautkramer, Training Coordinator, delivered the tests to the Operations employees nationwide in November and December. Work Keys was a key tool in assessing the skill levels of our employees. Individual follow-up training sessions in January and February gave employees the opportunity to go over their scores and set up development plans. Re-testing and testing of new employees is scheduled for the first quarter of 1998. Work Keys is a critical component of our training plan; the test results acted as a motivator and starting point for our employees. ■

Paul Annett
Executive Vice President, Administration
Liberty Check Printers

SPECIAL ISSUE

This 24-page issue of *Work Keys USA* features firsthand reports on Work Keys in action across North America. From Florida to Minnesota, from California to Virginia, Work Keys is helping businesses and educators solve the challenge of building a world-class workforce.

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The Florida Times-Union

Schools Seek Curriculum, Skills Match

School officials are tired of hearing employers complain that Duval County high school graduates aren't prepared for work, even entry-level positions.

Students are tired of finding out their diplomas don't certify them as job-ready.

"There's a real problem in the marketplace getting people ready to work," said School Board member Stan Jordan. "The jobs are here. The skills are not."

Interim Superintendent Donald Van Fleet and Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce officials think they have found a solution. Together, they are supporting a program called Work Keys that matches the skills employers think employees need with a curriculum focused on teaching those skills.

"It answers the questions that employers constantly ask on the preparedness of the work force," said Susan Milhoan, a spokeswoman for the chamber.

Van Fleet has tried to gather support for the program both locally and in Tallahassee. The chamber signed on, and Van Fleet hopes the state legislature will come through with the dollars to help put Work Keys in place.

Deputy Education Commissioner Bob Bedford said when his department receives its budget for the upcoming academic year, he expects there will be enough money to award a grant to Jacksonville for this innovative program.

But whether or not Tallahassee comes through with the $300,000 to $400,000 needed for Work Keys, Van Fleet said he is committed to the concept and will ask the School Board to set aside the dollars when it approves a budget this spring.

"We think it's important enough that we should move forward with it," Van Fleet said.

The idea is obvious: Give students the skills to perform in local jobs.

But it goes a step further. It opens a dialogue between business and education.

Instead of employers just pointing the finger at schools for not properly training their students, it gives employers the chance to explain what they need.

Businesses determine just what skill levels are required to perform the jobs they need done most, say, bank tellers or customer service representatives. Schools then provide the students with the corresponding skills.

The skills are basic—teamwork, listening, applied mathematics—but at least employers know just what they're getting.

Students are tested in the ninth grade to see what their abilities are and what jobs best suit them. In 12th grade, they are tested again, this time to prove they have mastered the concepts.

In this way, the school system can certify that graduates are employable—something diplomas don't always do.

"If you are seeking a graduate in the Duval County public schools for a particular position, you would know" they have the right skills, Van Fleet said.

Only 25 percent of Duval County's high school students enroll in college full-time after graduation, according to school system statistics. The other 75 percent head off to work in some capacity, either full-time or part-time, while continuing with their education.

Work Keys, developed by Iowa-based ACT, Inc., has been around for five years and is being used in different forms in dozens of locations around the country.

Tennessee is testing all of its 12th graders, while a program in St. Louis partners businesses with providers of adult education, not the local school system.

The Duval County program would be one of the most comprehensive done on a local level, said Mary Hutcheson, director of ACT's Florida office.

Some of the money will pay for testing. Some will pay to profile business needs. Some will cover the cost of training teachers in this new philosophy.

For example, if a student is interested in construction work and might need to know how much concrete to mix for a project, doing a sheet of multiplication and division problems won't be terribly useful.

Instead, "it's actually those dreaded word problems that are going to be work-based," said Margaret Smith-Kenyon, director of workforce development for the St. Louis Regional Commerce and Growth Association, which is sponsoring a Work Keys program in Missouri.

If the School Board supports it, preparation for the program will begin in July, Van Fleet said.

"I think it might be beneficial to our students," said board member Susan Wilkinson. "If 75 percent of our graduates go into the workforce, if there are programs out there proven to help develop skills, it merits our taking a good look at it."

Starting Off Right

Matching local students with the skills local employers need is one of those obvious needs that make people wonder why it hasn't been filled until now.

The new partnership of the public schools with business people is one that should produce benefits throughout the community.

Students today follow whatever courses they are interested in, whether they are likely to be of value in the job market or not. Of course, savvy parents, guidance counselors and others may influence those choices.

With the Work Keys program, students still will be free to choose. But they will have counseling to direct them into areas where jobs are waiting.

More importantly, the schools will be prepared to teach them the skills needed for whichever jobs they might choose.

Students will be tested in the ninth grade in an attempt to determine their abilities.

School officials will work with local businesses, such as banking and insurance, to see what job openings there will be in the future, and what specific teachable skills are needed in those jobs.

School officials will develop the curriculum to match those jobs.

The students will be tested again as seniors, to determine if they have mastered the skills.

The object is to make sure that students leaving the schools are ready for the work force, even if they move to another location.

That does not mean they cannot go on to college, or even to other types of jobs. But at least they will leave the schools employable, not just seeking employment.

Everyone has to have an entry level job. Most of them require certain basic, measurable and definable skills. Tailoring the school curriculum to fit them makes a lot of sense.

At the same time, it does not relegate anyone to a vocational job with no path of advancement.

This is not a silver bullet for the public schools. There is no such thing. But it is a step in the right direction after years of doing the same old thing at ever-increasing cost ■

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***The Florida Times-Union* (April 19, 1997)**

UPDATE

The Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce and the Duval County Public School System are using Work Keys to determine the needs of the Jacksonville business community and compare these needs to the skill levels of the students. "The Work Keys initiative is an important component in Jacksonville's economic strategy aimed at attracting high wage, high tech businesses," states Wally Lee, President of the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce.

Funding for the project has been fully secured, and the initiative has already resulted in an increased interaction between the Jacksonville business community and the public schools. The program has been praised for renewing confidence in the public school system's ability to provide a qualified high school graduate — a graduate who can immediately enter the workforce with high skills and high performance standards. Margaret LaRoe, Executive Vice President of the Jacksonville Chamber Foundation, says, "Bringing business and education together to build a prepared workforce for Jacksonville's future makes good sense. It benefits everyone — employers, educators and especially students."

"Our community has told us that our students need to be better prepared for the workforce. We believe that Work Keys is not only the avenue through which we can be responsive to that need, but is a program which we can use to help students achieve a brighter future. It also puts is in a position of extraordinary partnership with the local business community," says Dr. Donald Van Fleet, superintendent of Duval County Public Schools. "The Jacksonville Work Keys project will provide us with a strong measure of accountability. We must continually seek ways to assure parents that our schools are providing students with the skills necessary for success in the 21st century," adds Robert L. Bedford, Deputy Commissioner, Florida Department of Education.

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Bay Area to Use Work Keys for Workforce Development

The Bay Area Industry Education Council (BAIEC), together with its collaborative partners, has led the way for California's East Bay area to adopt Work Keys as a workforce development tool.

Bay Area companies are increasingly aware that the skills and knowledge of their employees give them a measurable, bottom-line advantage over competitors, and that to maintain their competitive edge, they must have access to skilled employees. As technology advances and markets change, these businesses need employees with basic core skills who can continue to learn.

The Bay Area is already known worldwide for the excellence and prosperity of its adult workforce, but the great majority of our youth could miss out on the benefits of the high-skill, high-wage economy unless dramatic improvements are made in their preparation to join the workforce.

Although Bay Area businesses have already clearly expressed a need for trained, workforce-ready employees, and local K–16 educators regularly consult with business leaders to plan curricula, they have made these efforts without the assistance of a system that can identify the specific skills and quantify the skill levels required for particular jobs. Before implementing the Work Keys system, they had no system for directing training support toward increasing employee skills in these key areas or for providing a way for employers to convey skills information to educators in a clear and meaningful way.

A Common Language

Work Keys job profiling (job analysis) identifies the skills and skill levels required by specific jobs. Schools and training centers can have access to this information. Employers can also use the Work Keys system to improve the skills of incumbent employees, the new hire process, job retention, and the bottom line.

Once a job has been profiled and skills standards established, students can be assessed to see how their skill levels compare with those needed for various occupations. The comparison of student scores with the skill levels revealed in the job profile produces valuable information which allows students and teachers to develop goals and the strategies to meet them. This adds meaning and relevance to each student's education experience.

An Integrated System

To assist with this process, the Work Keys system provides a series of instructional guides called Targets for Instruction. These guides help educators integrate the eight Work Keys skills into existing curricula. K–16 educators can use the revised curricula to enhance the teaching of real-world skills. The East Bay School-to-Career Partnership has already begun testing high school students on some Work Keys assessments.

For businesses, educators, and future workers to benefit from the Work Keys system, each group must actually use it. Employers need to profile jobs and provide the resulting information to educators. The K–16 education system must work to integrate that information into its curricula and pedagogy, and future workers must take advantage of the opportunity to acquire these skills.

Each validates the other: Educators look to industry to provide skills data, industry looks to educators to use the data to improve student learning, and students learn these skills and demonstrate that they are ready to be productive participants in the workforce.

A Regional Vision

Students and workers are highly mobile within the East Bay area and they share education resources and employment markets; and industry is inextricably linked to the pool of talent produced by local schools. A student from the Mt. Diablo District in Contra Costa County may well apply for a technology manufacturing position in Santa Clara, and a San Francisco County PIC training agency might place a graduate into one of many software start-ups in the Tri Valley Area. Workforce development can know no boundaries, particularly in a geopolitical economic region like the Bay Area.

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Our goal is to profile a total of two hundred jobs in one hundred companies over a two-year period, as part of a region-wide job profiling pilot project involving high-growth, high-skill industry clusters such as Manufacturing, Multimedia, Health & Bioscience, Software, Telecommunications, and Financial Services in all nine Bay Area counties.

At the same time, students from five pilot school districts will undergo Work Keys assessment to determine baseline skills information. Repeated student assessment will measure the impact of job profile data on curriculum development and student learning.

This region-wide use of the Work Keys system links workforce development, economic development, and education reform to assure both the success of those making transitions from school to career and the success of our local economy.

To date, BAIEC has focused its efforts on the East Bay and has developed partnerships with California State University at Hayward, the East Bay School-to-Career Partnership and its constituent schools, the Economic Development Alliance for Business, and others.

An undertaking of this magnitude is necessarily a long-term endeavor. In the first two years (the pilot period) roughly $1.6 million will be required to implement it. Major components of the pilot period include:

- Campaign to recruit one hundred Bay Area companies
- Profiling 200 job titles
- Work Keys curriculum integration for 20 schools
- Work Keys assessments for five thousand students

Supportive activities during the pilot period include an aggressive public awareness campaign in which business and education leaders will be introduced to the Work Keys system. Partners will be asked to actively participate in this campaign to introduce, inform, and build name recognition among constituent groups using the Work Keys system.

Looking Ahead

In the coming months, we will seek to expand the partnership to include the participation of schools with identified career pathways and/or California Academy style programs, and of labor, welfare-to-work training organizations that serve out-of-school youth and young adults, and other regional organizations concerned with economic and workforce development.

Schools will be queried for their level of preparedness to participate. Other prospective partners will provide qualifying information detailing how participation in a regional Work Keys pilot will enhance their school-to-career efforts and promote the mission of their organization.

Certification

The end result will be a certification system recognized by industry and education as a measure of student preparation for the workplaces of the twenty-first century. The system will be portable and will provide students with a way to document their skill levels for any employer who is Work Keys aware. The system will also provide employers with a way to assess and train both incumbent workers and new hires.

In subsequent years the model will be replicated in other Bay Area communities. Job profiling costs will decrease as economy of scale is reached and employers begin to underwrite this activity. Additional funding, however, will be required to support the work of integrating basic skills into high school curricula and underwriting student assessments in the more than 100 school districts located in the Bay Area region. ■

Gerald Bartlett
Vice President, Marketing
BAIEC

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Work Keys Helps Carbone Of America Comply With QS 9000 Standards

An auditor has lauded Carbone of America's use of Work Keys in meeting the training requirements for QS 9000 standards, the automotive industry equivalent of ISO 9000. In conducting a standards preaudit, an auditor told Michelle A. Wooldridge, Director of Human Resources at the firm's Farmville, Virginia, plant, that her training matrix design based on Work Keys job profiling data is the best plan he has seen for meeting the automotive industry standards. Carbone was given a total compliance designation for the training aspect of the standards during the preaudit.

Wooldridge's design includes a training regimen in both generic employability and job specific skills and for each job classification. She has worked with Louis "Mac" McGinty, an authorized Work Keys job profiler from the Keysville Campus of Southside Virginia Community College.

McGinty profiled all of Carbone's hourly jobs and two salaried positions. Profiling was followed by testing the workers using the Work Keys assessments. Southside Community College will begin delivering the training early next year for employees who need to advance to higher competency levels, according to Wooldridge.

Wooldridge notes that the involvement of Carbone's employees in the Work Keys process has improved morale by enhancing communications between workers and management. "They like being involved in developing the job task lists and determining their individual needs for development," she said.

"We expect to realize work efficiencies as the process matures," she added. "We see use of the Work Keys program and working with Southside Community College as being central to our ongoing concern with quality improvement."

Carbone plans to use Work Keys in hiring new workers, and Wooldridge regularly makes presentations to students regarding the Work Keys skills and competency levels that will be required to work at Carbone.

Southside Community College, along with five other community colleges in a workforce development consortium under the aegis of the Southside Virginia Business and Education Commission, has been designated a Work Keys Service Center by ACT. To qualify as a service center, an institution must have an authorized profiler and offer Work Keys assessment services and related instruction.

McGinty is also using Work Keys to serve other employers in the Southside Community College service area.

"Our work with Carbone is an illustration of how Southside can use a nationally recognized and backed program to boost the economy in its service area," McGinty said.

Wooldridge noted that Carbone wants to see secondary schools in its employment area use the program. "It is effective in communicating to both educators and students the skills and competency levels required to be a productive worker," she said.

For additional information, call McGinty at 804/736-2008 or Wooldridge at 804/395-8258. ■

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Flour City Packaging Focuses on a Workforce Development Program

Work Keys assessment scores have led to promotions for some individuals at Flour City Packaging. Sue Dorsett, a ten-year employee at the company, was promoted from a position on the plant floor finishing department to the position of Receptionist/Administrative Assistant. "I was hoping to get a different position in the plant," Ms. Dorsett said, "but instead I received the Receptionist position. I was very pleased."

Patrick Patsy held the position of Packer/Inspector in the plant. When he first heard about taking the Work Keys assessments, he saw it as an opportunity for management to find out what skills he had. Since taking the Work Keys assessments, Mr. Patsy has been promoted twice—from the production floor to quality, and then to the position of Estimator/Job Planner. "I would certainly recommend Work Keys to others," Mr. Patsy said. "Work Keys brings out hidden talents and skills people have, and it presents a special opportunity for those who are quiet and reserved." ■

Editor's Note: In a recent issue of *Work Keys USA*, we described how Minnesota's Flour City Packaging had begun using Work Keys. This update is supplied by Howie Anderson of Pine City Technical College and by Flour City Packaging—"Partners in Work Keys."

Sue Dorsett and co-worker Missy Walters.

Patrick Patsy.

Iowa Workforce Development's Work Keys Profilers Receive International Award

Congratulations to the Work Keys Specialists for Iowa Workforce Development (IWD). They have won second place in the Group Award of Merit Contest from the International Association of Personnel in Employment Security. The award was presented to Dean Mattix, the Iowa Chapter President, at the 84th Annual International Educational Conference and Convention held last summer in Columbus, Ohio. Winning this award is truly a great honor for IWD. The partnership with ACT proves their commitment to workforce development.

The Work Keys Specialists for IWD accomplished a first for the state of Iowa during 1996. They helped link employment and education by training state employees as Work Keys analysts. Eleven Work Keys Specialists received training from ACT to conduct profiles.

Dean Mattix receives the IAPES Award of Merit. From left to right: International President Mike Sheridan; Mattix; and Award of Merit Chair Charles Schultz.

Governor Terry Branstad and IWD Director Cynthia Eisenhauer selected this Work Keys project based on Iowa Business Council activities and employer needs across the state. Because many employers are not equipped to profile the skill levels required in their jobs and to assess prospective and current workers as to the skills they bring to those jobs, they look to IWD to provide these services. Employers want to increase the availability of a qualified workforce, improve the productivity of employees, and reduce the cost of poor selection and turnover. This is now possible with the services the Work Keys Specialists offer.

Employers and schools purchase Work Keys with the expectation that this system will improve their future workforce. Their expectations are met. While the Work Keys Specialists promote this valuable tool, it also improves the agency's image.

"I'm proud to say that Iowa is the first state employment service where every regional office is a Work Keys Service Center," explained Iowa Governor Terry Branstad.

ACT President Richard Ferguson put it this way: "Iowa Workforce Development's achievement is unique in the nation and reflects great vision and accomplishment on the part of all involved."

Iowa Workforce Development Director Cynthia Eisenhauer commented, "I have never seen a product or service so valued by employers and educators as Work Keys. The specialists have changed the department's operation and image from a bureaucratic service agency to a dynamic, customer-centered business."

"The Workforce Development Center has provided invaluable support and assistance in making the Work Keys concept a successful and prosperous endeavor for our organization," explained Ted Nuese, Human Resources manager for Firestone Agricultural Tire Company in Des Moines. ■

Sharon Dralle
IWD Work Keys Specialist and Past President
Iowa Chapter, International Association of Personnel in Employment Security

McHenry County Unlocks the Door to Qualified Workers

In late 1994, the Center for Commerce and Economic Development of McHenry County College (MCC) in Crystal Lake, Illinois, partnered with ACT and had a staff member trained and authorized as a Work Keys Job Profiler. Susan Van Weelden, Associate Dean of the Center for Commerce and Economic Development at MCC, became involved with the first-ever industry-driven Workforce Development Symposium in the county. This effort resulted in the creation of a County Workforce Development Board, which is a component of the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation.

Susan introduced the Work Keys system to the Board and the Board voted to pursue McHenry County Community Development Block Grant funds for the Work Keys project. Susan and two other board members wrote and defended the grant proposal before the County Block Grant Commission. They were granted $72,250. MCC's Center for Economic Development serves as the administrative entity for the block grant funds. The project is designed to identify job skills for particular occupations that will help determine areas in which workers and students will benefit from training. Susan Van Weelden hired Consultant Ginger Knapp to coordinate the project. Susan arranged to borrow additional profilers from other community colleges within the Fox Valley Educational Alliance/Economic Development Panel.

The first part of the project focused on job analyses, or profiles, of nine McHenry County jobs in high growth industries. Work Keys Coordinator Ginger Knapp and her team of profilers set out to identify skills required for the following occupations: customer service representative, electronic technician, fabrication welder, machine operator, maintenance mechanic, MIG welder, quality assurance technician, shipping and receiving clerk, and tool and die maker.

"Profiling is a way to actually see what employees do," said Knapp, who arranged for area companies to participate in the analyses. "Once you know what skills are needed for a particular job, you can hire people who have the skills or train people in certain areas."

Assessments have now been administered to students in area high schools, public aid clients, and interested adults. Participants receive their results at a personal feedback session in which they are given brochures on the profiles conducted. The eleven participating companies also provide brochures, letters, business cards, and company handbooks for the participants.

Eleven industrial companies in McHenry County participated in the Work Keys project, a project sponsored by the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation/Workforce Development Board, McHenry County College Center for Commerce and Economic Development, McHenry County Cooperative for Employment Education, and the Illinois Employment and Training One Stop Center.

The MCC Center for Commerce and Economic Development initiative brings together educators, industry and job applicants using the Work Keys common metric to describe employability skills. Knapp said, "I encourage others to explore results of the real power of a tool like the Work Keys system." According to Associate Dean Susan Van Weelden of MCC, "This project is working because of the collaboration of the various partners." ■

Ginger Knapp
Work Keys Project Coordinator
McHenry County College
Crystal Lake, Illinois

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Growing a Regional Work Keys Program in Southwestern Pennsylvania

One of the most difficult questions to answer when starting a Work Keys program in a region is, "Where do you begin?" Student Work Keys test scores have little meaning without the availability of local occupational and job profile information. For schools to do testing, they need assurances that the test scores will be of value to the business community. Employers often don't see the need to profile jobs or participate in occupational profiles if schools aren't committed to testing students. Neither group, employers nor employee providers, wants to be the first to invest the time, effort and dollars in the potential future benefits that the Work Keys system offers. Although the dynamics of each region is different, and therefore the starting place may need to be different, examining how other regions have approached the start-up process can give everyone valuable insights. Southwestern Pennsylvania is a case in point.

One of the leading proponents of Work Keys in Southwestern Pennsylvania is Robin K. Rogers, Executive Director of the Allegheny County Private Industry Council, the Commission for Workforce Excellence. The seeds of Rob Rogers' vision for the use of Work Keys in Southwestern Pennsylvania were sown in 1994 when Tom Saterfiel, then Director of Research for ACT, came to Pittsburgh to address the Allegheny Policy Council, and a few months later when Dick Ferguson, ACT's President, addressed the Pennsylvania 2000 board. Rogers' vision, "to use the Work Keys system as the central element in stimulating regional economic growth by promoting excellence in educational and training programs that enable individuals to work to their full potential," has been the motivating force behind a number of regional initiatives that are now just beginning to bear fruit.

John Kingsmore, President of the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), shares Rogers' vision. After Rob Rogers obtained school-to-work funds to have 12 CCAC instructors certified as Work Keys job profilers, Kingsmore followed through with the process to have CCAC become an ACT-designated Work Keys Service Center. "Work Keys is a valuable tool to make certain we're matching employer needs with employee skills," says Kingsmore. CCAC has since profiled over 200 jobs and occupations in the region, engaged in a process of continuous curriculum improvement to meet the needs of local employers, and, along with Rob Rogers, convened a consortium of local companies that use Work Keys so that they can learn from each other's experiences.

Jeanne Berdik, Managing Director of School-to-Work Programs for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center (SPIRC) and School-to-Work Program Coordinator Penny Weidner also share this vision. "Using a federal grant for industry cluster development, SPIRC has completed 24 occupational profiles in six industry clusters critical to the region's economic growth," says Weidner. "We wanted to communicate industry skill level needs to educators and trainers using concrete language for them to examine their curricula. We are coordinating 20 regional school-to-work programs and Work Keys provides a common language for employers and schools to communicate."

The Commission for Workforce Excellence and SPIRC have also used the services of the Lyceum Group. Founded by two educators dedicated to bridging the gap between business and education, the Lyceum Group consults locally and nationally on education, training and workforce development issues. Its two principals, David Mosey and Bob Dove, became authorized Work Keys profilers in 1996 and have since completed profiles for both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations all over Western Pennsylvania. They have consulted with industrial resource centers, school-to-work programs, and private companies, and have designed and implemented training modules to improve employee skill development. They, too, share Rob Rogers' vision.

"The next step will combine the efforts of all of these resources," says Rogers. "We now have support from local foundations to fund a project that will build on the work that SPIRC has done, using the Lyceum Group and CCAC to profile 100 key regional occupations to add to SPIRC's 24 profiles

and 40 done across Pennsylvania to create a database of 164 regional profiles accessible from a web site. This database can then be used by secondary and postsecondary schools, school-to-work programs, vocational schools, employers, community agencies, guidance counselors and career advisors, and individuals facing career decisions."

Additional Work Keys initiatives are springing up within the region. Recently, Pam Wiegman, the Director of School-to-Work for Pittsburgh City Schools, expressed the desire to use Work Keys as a foundation for basic skills development for the district. She has involved some city schools in a Work Keys testing project sponsored by SPIRC and being implemented by the Lyceum Group. Ron Painter, Manager of the Pittsburgh Partnership, has begun pilot projects aimed at using Work Keys as the basis for local welfare-to-work and JTPA programs. The Board of Trustees for a local Charter School has decided to use Work Keys assessments in their new school and they plan to rely on regional occupational profiles for career counseling and academic motivation.

The Working Together Consortium is a major regional economic development initiative of the Allegheny Conference on Economic Development. Dr. Mark Nordenberg, Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, is the chair of a committee that is developing a regional strategic workforce development plan. Among the action items contained in the committee's final draft report is that the region adopt Work Keys as the official assessment mechanism.

Dr. Robin Rogers, Commission for Workplace Excellence Executive Director

Mr. David Mosey (foreground) and Dr. Bob Dove (background), Lyceum Group Principals.

Work Keys is also a major component of the regional one-stop career system (Career Development Marketplace). The occupational profiles created by this project will be used by employment and training agencies in the one-stop system to better understand the skill requirements of employers with job openings, initially in the financial services sector.

The most important element in the successful start-up of this regional initiative is the leadership, cooperation and shared vision of four organizations: The Allegheny County Commission for Workforce Excellence, the Community College of Allegheny County, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Association, and the Lyceum Group. The ability of these entities to work together has resulted in the marketplace hearing one consistent message about the power and effectiveness of a comprehensive approach to regional workforce development using the Work Keys system.

For additional information concerning the initiatives mentioned in this article, contact Dr. Bob Dove or David Mosey at the Lyceum Group at 412/261-5570. ■

Dr. Bob Dove
Vice President, Lyceum Group

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Pine Technical College's Work Keys Service Center Is Growing to Serve Area Business

A little over a year ago, Pine Technical College received a major grant from the Minnesota Job Skills partnership to "provide manufacturing and related skill training for approximately 250 employees located in east central Minnesota." The project was intended to strengthen the connection between education/training and the workplace requirements of area employers in order for them to remain competitive in today's and the future marketplace. For the past 12–14 months, Pine Technical College and area partners have been moving forward on this initiative, with some very substantive results.

What started as a discussion among representatives of two different communities has now grown to a cooperative partnership involving two colleges, four public and private agencies, several school districts and six businesses throughout the five-county area.

An important accomplishment of this group, which has since evolved into the East Central Minnesota Labor Force Committee, has been the acquisition of an assessment tool developed by ACT called Work Keys. Implementation of the Work Keys model by Department of Economic Development and Pine Technical College staff has been providing area employers and educators an effective method of profiling jobs, assessing individual skill levels, evaluating curriculum and training products, and prescribing the appropriate training for current workers as well as students and others preparing to enter the work force.

Work Keys targets specific training in the high performance "transferable" skill areas such as applied mathematics, applied technology, teamwork, and researching information.

In a little over a year of implementation, the following benefits have already been realized:

- a redefinition of basic work skills as seen by business, industry and education in the region and moving statewide
- the establishment of a well-defined process of identifying essential job functions and skills required to perform those functions
- to connect area secondary and post-secondary schools directly with industry to establish a true dialogue of educational missions and business/industry need
- over 150 employees from 13 companies have been assessed for training needs, with another 1,000 projected over the next 18 months
- curriculum evaluation at eight area high schools of needed employment competencies
- almost 1/2 million dollars in private and public money has been raised or pledged to implement this initiative
- expansion and training in the Work Keys concept to other parts of the state—Anoka, Alexandria, and St. Cloud.

So what does this mean to area employers? It means that Pine Technical College, designated as Minnesota's first ACT Work Keys Service Center, is open for business and is ready to offer its services to local companies upon request.

Those services can include using Work Keys to assess the job skills of current employees or future hires; profiling of existing jobs to identify job competencies needed for success; identifying and/or arranging training to enable workers to improve skills to meet specific job profiles; or combinations of the above.

Staff are available to assist companies in all of these areas. A call to Howie Anderson, Work Keys Service Center Director, will get the process started. He can be reached at 800/521-7463. ■

Howie Anderson
Pine Technical College
Pine City, Minnesota

ICI Polyester and John Tyler Community College Launch Model Employee Development Program

In Hopewell, Virginia, John Tyler Community College and ICI Polyester are using Work Keys to create what amounts to a model program for employee development and a productive partnership between a postsecondary institution and a major employer.

Jack Heslin, Coordinator of Workforce Development at John Tyler and an authorized Work Keys profiler, and Hugh Luck, Training Coordinator at ICI, have joined forces to establish a long-range partnership for ongoing employee development at the corporation using ACT's Work Keys system.

The effort was launched by profiling eight production jobs. Two more jobs—quality technician and production technician—have since been profiled.

Employees in the profiled jobs have been administered the Work Keys assessments. The next step is to compare scores on the assessments with job requirements and to create a career development plan for each employee. Employees who need to raise their competency levels to match those identified during the profiling process will be provided with the necessary instruction. Others, who want to qualify for promotion, will be offered instruction to bring their competencies to the levels required by the new job. John Tyler will deliver the instruction either in the Hopewell plant or at one of the institution's campuses, depending on the needs of the employees.

ICI is also using the Work Keys profiles and assessments as part of the process for hiring new workers. John Tyler does the testing and offers career counseling to applicants who fail to qualify. It follows the same procedure with other employers in its service area who are using the Work Keys program.

"We want to turn a negative experience into positive career decision," said Heslin. "By counseling with the failed applicants, we can interpret their Work Keys scores, lay out a personal development plan, and show them how John Tyler instruction and services can help them qualify for such jobs in the future."

Luck notes that ICI is making other uses of the job data produced by profiling jobs. "We are asking employees and supervisors to use the task lists to determine whether all the tasks performed by workers are adding value to the final product," he said. "We may find that some of the tasks really aren't needed to produce a quality product.

"The end result may be the restructuring of how work is organized. Without the Work Keys job profiling data, we wouldn't be able to conduct such an analysis," he added.

ICI employees have been generally very positive about the Work Keys process, according to Luck. "We made sure," he said, "that employees knew the program is basically an investment in their future — assuring that they remain employable and productive in a highly competitive international economy."

The concept on which Work Keys is based, Heslin points out, is an ideal program for both an employer and the community college. John Tyler became involved with Work Keys through a consortium effort of six Virginia community colleges led by the Southside Virginia Business and Education Commission.

Work Keys provides a solid basis for employee development and is an important factor in hiring decisions, allowing the community college to be effective in one of its important functions — fostering economic development by assuring a high quality workforce, Heslin added. "I also like the program because it makes very clear to secondary and community college students the skills and competencies they need to secure well paying jobs," he said.

More than 50 Virginia employers are now using Work Keys.

More information may be obtained by calling Jack Heslin at 804/861-2762 or Hugh Luck at 804/530-9822. ■

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Polaris Industries Committed to Excellence

Polaris Industries Inc. experienced a 100% increase in sales growth during the past four years, topping $1.19 billion in 1996. During the same period, the workforce grew from 1,925 to over 3,500 employees. Company growth does not come without its challenges. New product development and innovation, along with new manufacturing technologies, have been catalysts forcing Polaris to aggressively train both new and current employees. Recent employee training efforts have been in team building, continuous improvement, world class manufacturing, just-in-time manufacturing, supervisor/leadership training and upgrading employee computer skills.

To ensure continued growth at Polaris, a corporate team established a goal to implement training and education programs to improve employee job performance and provide personal growth opportunities. This goal means Polaris must create a learning environment where employees not only have the opportunity to be trained in their current job, but also to prepare for future jobs.

In order to determine where meaningful training should be targeted, the team searched for an assessment tool that would match the skills required to perform specific jobs to the talents each employee possessed. Our team reviewed several alternatives, including Work Keys. Work Keys, developed and marketed by ACT, was selected for the project. In addition, Howie Anderson and Joe Hobson, Pine Technical College, have been instrumental in facilitating the project. The College was a pioneer in collaborating with ACT to introduce Work Keys to the business community.

Selecting a Pilot Group for Work Keys

Our Osceola, Wisconsin, facility had experienced considerable growth since Polaris acquired it in 1991. Employment increased from 125 to nearly 750 today. In 1995, Polaris-Osceola began assembling Polaris-made engines and clutches. This new venture group was chosen for our Work Keys pilot because new equipment, unfamiliar to employees, was purchased, the group was ideally small (slightly over 100) and all employees performed similar jobs, where similar skills were required. Also, Pine Technical College is within a 50-mile drive of Osceola, which allowed easy access to Howie and Joe.

Work Keys Results

When Work Keys was introduced to the pilot group in August 1996, nearly one half of the employees volunteered to be Subject Matter Experts to develop the job profile. Today, all employees in the pilot group have been assessed in the skills identified in the job profiling process. Based on the job profile and the results of the employee's personal assessments, individual skill gaps have been identified. Skill gaps were found in three areas: Applied Technology, Observation, and Locating Information.

The identified skill gaps are not unique to Polaris employees. Similar results have been identified at other companies using Work Keys. Also, over 550 high school students throughout the country were assessed using Work Keys skills with similar results. This indicates that secondary-level educators can and must assist in training our future workforce through improved curricula using Work Keys results.

Training: Pilot Project

In December 1996, Michael Hruby, a contract instructor, trained twelve employees from the Osceola pilot group in applied technology. The results were very encouraging. Fifty percent of the students improved at least one skill level, 30% increased their skills by two levels, and 10% moved three levels. One employee remained unchanged.

This past summer, Julie Dillenburg and Gloria Baker, Pine Technical College, trained employees in Applied Technology. They set up a computer flex

lab, with Plato software, for the employees to use on their own time, and met with line supervisors to obtain specific training requirements. From this information they developed a nine hour introductory course. The course was offered on a pass/fail basis and the curriculum included math (metrics and thousandths), basic components of pneumatics & hydraulic systems and theory, measuring tools, thread interpretations and specifications, and a hands-on lab exercise.

Each day, the group met for instruction and review, and then was split into two groups. The first group went with Julie for more classroom instruction and the other group went with Gloria to the lab/experiment area. Halfway through the three hour instruction periods, the groups switched places and the process was repeated. The instructors' pre-tests results showed five percent of the employees passing. After the introductory course, the post-test results showed an eighty percent success rate.

As previously mentioned, Polaris Industries is committed to growth and diversity of its product line. The recent announcement that the company will introduce its first motorcycle in 1998 is one example of this commitment. Polaris is also committed to improving product quality and performance. In doing so, we desire to train and promote new and current employees into the most optimal skilled positions possible. With the current shortage of a skilled labor pool, it only makes sense that Polaris provide the most relevant training to meet our needs. The partnership established between Pine Technical College and Polaris Industries will enable us to achieve this goal. ■

Mary Zins
Vice President, Human Resources
Polaris Industries
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Work Keys a Graduation Requirement for Wichita Public Schools

Students in the Wichita Public Schools take ACT's Work Keys Reading for Information and Applied Mathematics assessments in the ninth grade and a full battery of eight assessments in the eleventh grade. The completion (without any stipulation of minimum scores) of the Work Keys assessments in grade eleven is a graduation requirement, beginning with the class of 1998. The early impact of Work Keys can be seen in some of the following ways:

- The interest and involvement of the Wichita business community is increasing, as evidenced by the increasing number of Work Keys analysts in the Wichita area and the involvement of major area employers in the Work Keys process.
- The Wichita Public Schools is providing a major staff development emphasis in Work Keys related instruction.
- During the 1996–97 school year, over 3,000 ninth graders and 2,300 eleventh graders participated in Work Keys assessments. At the completion of the current (1997–98) school year, over 10,000 young people will have experienced Work Keys assessments. ■

H. Guy Glidden
Director of Pupil Assessment and Evaluation
Wichita Public Schools

Work Keys Heads North: Canadian Colleges Become Work Keys Service Centers

In five years, up to 120 Canadian community and technical colleges will house Work Keys Service Centers. That's the prediction of Terry Anne Boyles, vice president for national services at the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC). "We've launched a campaign encouraging every one of our members to become Work Keys sites," says Boyles. ACT has designated the 180-member association the sole representative for Work Keys in this education-conscious nation of nearly 30 million.

Like the United States, Canada has seen federal deficits balloon in recent years, and like us, it has responded by cutting many programs, including aid to higher education. "In the past, colleges relied on business and industry for about a quarter of their operating income," says Boyles. "Now that they receive less assistance from the government, they're expected to obtain 50 percent or even more of their operating income from the private sector. This means our member institutions have to become even more creative in finding new ways to provide useful services to their constituents. Work Keys offers them an opportunity to serve business and labor while bringing in much-needed dollars. It's a perfect answer to our needs."

From the beginning, Canadian community and technical colleges have been considered major engines of local economic development. "The colleges have traditionally provided most of the continuing education for Canada's workforce, and virtually every college program is overseen by a business-labor advisory committee," says Boyles. "Now we're developing even closer relationships with business, including on-the-job training, internships, and product development. It's all part of Canada's move to a 'knowledge economy' that reflects the technologies and business methods of the 1990s."

As part of this effort, ACCC members worked with the Conference Board of Canada to define employability skills Canadian employers need in their workforce. "Once these skills were identified, it became clear that a good tool was needed to measure them. Our search for a reputable instrument quickly led us to Work Keys," says Boyles. The result was a partnership with ACT and ACCC designation as Work Keys' sole Canadian representative.

A marketing strategy called College Canada helps member colleges promote Work Keys services. "College Canada is based on the concept that all our members are parts of a single nationwide entity," explains Ruth Watson, ACCC director of client services. "College Canada allows business, labor, and government to access all 180 of our colleges and technical institutes and select those which can deliver the services they need. College Canada helps us promote Work Keys in a pan-Canadian way."

ACCC has also helped its members develop partnerships with business and industry around the world. "Our members currently have partnerships in more than 85 countries," says Watson. "This internationalization allows our members to give students, faculty, and administrators experience in the growing global economy." Through these partnerships, Work Keys has attracted the interest of many Canada-based multinationals. "They like Work Keys because they need to standardize the skills and skill levels of a worldwide workforce. Whether in Canada, India, or Mexico, workers with similar job titles must be trained to similar levels of proficiency. Work Keys Service Centers offer a systematic approach to this critical task."

"We at ACT are pleased to be working with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges and, through the ACCC, with colleges and technical institutes across Canada," says ACT president Richard L. Ferguson. "As our closest friend and largest trading partner, Canada has always had a special relationship with the United States. We're delighted that ACT will be playing a growing role in that evolving relationship." ■

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Retention Rates Are High for Workers Hired Through Ontario Work Keys Program

Over the past few months, the Work Keys Service Center at Georgian College has found positions for more than 150 workers. Only five have left their jobs—all for reasons unrelated to their job skills. "The retention rate is excellent," says Deb French, who manages the Georgian Source, the college's contract training division. "Work Keys has proven highly successful at matching people with appropriate jobs."

Located in Barrie, Ontario, the college finds jobs for recently laid-off workers under a federal program funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). "We're extremely pleased with the Georgian Source," says Jan Robertson, of HRDC's Barrie office. "We were unfamiliar with Work Keys, and selecting a Work Keys Service Center for this contract was a calculated risk. It's one we're glad we took." Job-seekers in this economically diverse city of 85,000 have found positions as land use planners, legal assistants, interior designers, auto service workers, and veterinary assistants, as well as in many other occupations.

"Work Keys assessments are the basis of our placement system," says French. "Clients take all eight Work Keys assessments, and the results are added to our employee database. When employers have positions to fill, we ask them to estimate the level of ability required in each skill area. We then search the database for individuals whose skills match those needs."

"Work Keys is a powerful tool for employers and workers alike," adds Robertson. "For employers, it vastly reduces the risk of hiring the wrong person. For workers, it provides valuable information for making life decisions." Workers not only use Work Keys scores to document their abilities when seeking employment, they may also use them as the basis of a personal education and career plan. "When people learn their test results, they often gain insight into the reasons they have had trouble finding a job," French says. "Some of our clients have used Work Keys results to set new career goals that fit their particular abilities."

While work for HRDC continues, the Georgian Source will soon take on a number of additional assignments. "We're currently developing training programs to help workers and job seekers improve the workplace skills defined and measured by Work Keys. We have also signed contracts to assess skills and profile jobs for several local businesses. We expect our Work Keys Service Center to generate a great deal of activity for us over the years to come." ■

Work Keys Builds Virginia's Workforce

"Like many Americans, we in the business community have often been outspoken critics of education. But we've tended to speak in global, abstract terms. We've had trouble finding a practical way to make a difference," says John W. MacIlroy, president of the Virginia Manufacturers Association (VMA). "We have wanted to encourage workplace learning, but we needed a tool that could measure progress and provide a common language that allowed the business and education communities to understand each other." Now, VMA has found that tool—and, together with John Tyler Community College, is using it in an energetic campaign to improve education in Virginia. The tool is ACT's Work Keys system, the "missing link" between learning and doing.

"For years, our members complained they couldn't find folks with the skills to do the jobs they needed done," says MacIlroy. "With Work Keys, ACT has produced a realistic tool that helps bridge the gap between 'learning to know' and 'learning to do.' It provides an immediate, practical, reality-based opportunity to improve the link between schooling and work."

MacIlroy and VMA members first learned of Work Keys three years ago at a conference on education and work cosponsored by VMA. "The goal was to bring together manufacturers and educators and open a dialogue between these groups," says MacIlroy. "ACT's Jerry Miller spoke on Work Keys, and what he said really intrigued us. We felt that Work Keys offered a real-world solution to our members' problems—that it could help create the workplace of tomorrow. We've been believers in Work Keys ever since."

Soon after the conference, VMA and John Tyler Community College formed a partnership to address workforce education in central Virginia. With the help of a grant from the Southside Virginia Alliance for Bridging Work and Education, Tyler became a Work Keys Service Center. The college profiles jobs and assesses skills for VMA members and other businesses, and the results are used in making hiring decisions. The net effect has been a better match between workers and jobs.

The partnership also reaches out to selected area high schools. Working with counselors and teachers in four schools, partnership staff have identified a group of students who plan to enter the workforce upon graduation, evaluated their skills using Work Keys assessments, helped them identify occupations that interest them, and shown them how their assessment results compare to the skills these jobs require. "Our next step is to help these young people bridge the gaps between their assessment scores and the skill levels demanded by the jobs they want," says Jack Heslin, coordinator for workforce services at John Tyler.

VMA is also using public television to connect with young people. "We're putting together a program modeled on 'Industry on Parade,' a show that was popular back in the '50s," says Roy Reynolds, director of marketing and member services for VMA. "We'll show how some of Virginia's products get made and what the workplace looks like. We'll profile various tasks in the production chain, showing the economic rewards they offer, the training they require, and the Work Keys skill levels needed to perform them successfully. We're trying to reach out to the high schools—and to everyone else who will listen!"

An educated workforce is vital to the area's continued economic health, says Reynolds. "To expand, our members are dependent upon finding people who have the basic skills. We don't expect new employees to have expertise as machinists or machine operators, but we do want them to possess the core knowledge and learning skills they need to learn new tasks.

"Ironically, in the past, manufacturers have found it easier to specify what they wanted in materials than what they needed in an employee! When they ordered a component, they could specify every aspect of the item: tensile strength, alloy type, you name it. But when it came to people, they never had a language they could use to communicate what they wanted. Work Keys provides that language and offers that specificity."

"If Virginia is to continue to attract the kinds of top-flight companies we want, our public education system must graduate competent students who are both willing and able to become productive workers," adds MacIlroy. "Educational systems should be preparing everyone for a smooth transition from school to work, and students should be encouraged to see the connection between their schooling and their future as productive individuals. Work Keys helps with these tasks. It helps close the gap between the levels of job skills needed in today's workplace and the actual skill levels possessed by today's students and employees. It's a practical tool for learning in a work-oriented society." ■

Workers in a Virginia plant discuss Work Keys. Photo courtesy Virginia Manufacturers Association.

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Texas Workforce Center Meets Needs of Area Job Seekers and Employers

A recent addition to the list of Work Keys Service Centers in Texas is the Capital of Texas Workforce Center (CTWC) in Austin. The CTWC is a one-stop career development system designed to meet the needs of area job seekers and employers. The CTWC is helping to upgrade the general workforce by training and retraining thousands of area workers through programs such as the Job Training Partnership Act, TANF Employment Services, and Food Stamp Employment and Training. The CTWC also provides customized services for area employers to assist them in their search for qualified employees. Work Keys is one of the assessment systems the CTWC staff provide to both their internal and external customers. The feedback regarding the results of the Work Keys assessment system has been very positive.

The CTWC has benefited from the Work Keys' triangular features, i.e., assessment, job profiling, and instructional development. One example is the Jobs Ahead! (JA!) program. JA! is a pilot project designed by a collaborative partnership among the following groups: Capital Area Workforce Development Board (CAWDB), City of Austin staff, Travis County staff, and local employers. JA! staff are utilizing the Work Keys system in their certification of program graduates. Participants in the JA! program attend Employability Skills Core Curriculum classes focusing on (1) workplace knowledge and skills (i.e., teamwork, world of work, computer principles, technical writing, and individual responsibility), (b) communication (oral and written, as well as reading), and (c) math. Upon completion of the training program, certificates are awarded to participants who achieve the criteria skill levels set by the CAWDB.

JA! program participants take the Work Keys Applied Mathematics test. Photo courtesy Capital of Texas Workforce Center.

The CTWC staff have also used the Work Keys system to aid Austin employers in their hiring process. For example, utilizing Work Keys as an assessment tool, CTWC staff assisted Samsung (an international semiconductor company) in conducting recruitment and pre-screening for semiconductor manufacturing technician positions required to open a new local manufacturing plant. As a result, Samsung's Austin plant is up and running, staffed with manufacturing technicians who possess the skill levels necessary to perform their jobs well.

In addition to meeting the needs of external customers, CTWC staff have used Work Keys to meet its internal needs as well. The CTWC's certified job profiler examined the CTWC positions of assessment counselors and career consultants. Results indicated that advanced observation, listening, writing, and reading for information skills are critical for successful performance in both positions. The CTWC, already considered an exemplary system by both local and statewide workforce professionals, can now use the Work Keys job profiling results in its internal improvement process. By making staff training and personal growth opportunities targeting these skills available to appropriate staff, CTWC can maintain the outstanding skill levels of the current assessment and counseling teams and facilitate their increased abilities to serve the Austin community even better. ■

Shu-Ching Chen
Austin/Travis County Private Industry Council, Inc.
Austin, Texas

The Greater Washington Board of Trade Undertakes a Workforce Availability Project

The Greater Washington Board of Trade, a regional Chamber of Commerce for the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia and suburban Maryland, has undertaken a major effort to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of knowledgeable workers to meet the needs of area employers. Initial surveys of employers in the Greater Washington area reveals about 19,000 vacant positions in information technology, telecommunications, and Internet-related technology jobs in Northern Virginia alone. These 19,000 jobs represent about 10 percent of the total number of vacancies in similar jobs in the U.S. According to the Information Technology Association of America, there are a total of about 191,000 unfilled technology jobs throughout the U.S. and half of the vacancies are in non-technology firms. The Greater Washington Board of Trade's 1997–1999 Strategic Plan identifies the availability of knowledgeable workers as a critical issue facing the Washington, D.C., region's employers and economy.

Accordingly, the Board of Trade's Executive Committee directed the Workforce Availability Task Force to complete several projects. These include (1) completing work with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management to facilitate the transition of released regional federal employees into the private sector because of government restructuring, (2) defining specific technology and science skills needed by area firms, (3) enhancing worker recruitment and retention through new tools and educational workshops, and (4) cooperating with other regional workforce development initiatives to ensure the achievement of their goals. Efforts to complete each of these four tasks are under way, including a pilot project that incorporates the use of Work Keys.

Members of the task force include the CEO's of firms that are experiencing serious shortfalls of knowledgeable workers and representatives of area colleges and universities. The Task Force has commissioned ACT to profile 10 jobs filled by knowledgeable workers in the region. These include jobs titled Network Administrator, Network Engineer, Support/Trouble Shooting, Webmaster, Master Technician, Technician and File Maintenance Clerk. Three other jobs will be identified and profiled.

The employers include a major bank, a large grocery chain, an automotive repair and replacement business, a non-profit association, and a computer software company. The job profiling is expected to be completed by the end of December.

A second phase of the pilot project will be undertaken as soon as the profiling has been completed. This phase of the project will include assessing incumbent job holders and applicants for the jobs that have been profiled to identify any gaps between the skills needed for successful performance and the skills possessed by the incumbents and job applicants. Any gaps identified by the assessments will be shared with the educational community and the human resources departments of the employers involved in this project.

Once the pilot project is completed, the Task Force will have to suggest future actions the Board should undertake to fulfill its primary goal of ensuring an adequate supply of knowledgeable workers in the region. There are several alternatives. If it is determined that, by and large, the incumbents and applicants for knowledge-based jobs possess the skills needed for successful performance, the Task Force can focus its efforts on increasing the supply of workers. On the other hand, if the project identifies any gaps in skills needed and skills possessed, the Task Force will have to recommend actions that surrounding educational systems and institutions can take to help produce appropriately trained employees and job applicants. Finally, the Task Force will be asked to evaluate the feasibility of the Board of Trade providing profiling and assessments as an ongoing service to its members. Ensuring an adequate supply of knowledge-based workers is going to be a long term struggle for the education system in the region as companies continue to create new products and services. ■

"Filling in the Gaps": Design and Delivery of Work Keys-Based Training Programs

For many in the business of delivering Work Keys services, the key ingredient has been the design and delivery of Work Keys-based training programs. While ACT has provided the Targets for Instruction, it is up to schools and service centers to determine what, specifically, to do with these Targets. It is a definite staff development challenge!

For the past year, Barry Nathan has been developing products and services that help Work Keys users meet this challenge. Nathan, president of Advancing Employee Systems, Inc., (AES) a consulting firm based in Phoenix, Arizona, was with the ACT Center for Education and Work for many years.

"It's a tight labor market out there, and businesses are becoming desperate for skilled employees. Service Centers are perfectly positioned to meet this need. But while so much attention has focused on job profiling and assessment, the delivery of Work Keys training seemed to be lagging. I want to help schools and colleges leverage their greatest asset, their instructors, to meet that need," Nathan said.

AES is moving in three directions to help Work Keys users. Instruction and training help came first. "Initially I just wanted to provide workbooks for instructors," said Nathan. So far, AES has workbooks in two areas (mathematics and graphics interpretation), and a third area (reading) will be ready shortly. AES material was developed from the Work Keys targets and coincides with three Work Keys areas: Applied Mathematics, Locating Information, and Reading for Information. Each workbook covers one level of skills, just like the Work Keys levels, so each learner can work on material appropriate for his or her own skill level. AES will soon offer computer-based Work Keys related training material as well.

Nathan has also been providing workshops on Work Keys instruction. "To take advantage of Work Keys, instructors really need to understand what makes Work Keys skills both similar to and different from their academic counterparts. The Targets for Instruction do a great job of explaining this, but we were hearing that instructors wanted face-to-face workshops to 'jump start' their understanding of Work Keys, so we just started responding to the market."

AES is moving in two other directions to help Work Keys users. It is developing a database management system for Service Centers. The software will import assessment data from ACT's Express Score software, allowing Service Centers to manage, manipulate, and access their assessment data to meet their client's needs; store profile information collected by authorized job profilers; and, most importantly, calculate skill gaps and workforce training needs to help Service Centers and their business clients estimate training costs and resource requirements.

Finally, AES has been providing advice and consulting to Work Keys users. Nathan has been working with the Phoenix Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Phoenix Human Resource Management Association to provide educators with business-based basic skills standards using the Work Keys system. He has also been working with Southwestern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center and the Commission for Workforce Excellence, both centered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as they implement Work Keys in regional school-to-work and workforce development projects.

"Five years ago, it seemed like all we heard from employers was their desire to downsize and eliminate employees. Now they've come full circle; they need skilled employees. It's an exciting time to be in this business, and I'm thrilled through my work to support the Work Keys mission," Nathan concluded.

For more information call Nathan at 602/460-5589 or fax 602/460-5597. ■

Editor's Note: Each issue of *Work Keys USA* will feature articles about instructional materials and services that the provider has determined align to ACT's Work Keys system. While ACT does not endorse any instructional products or providers, we do offer a free list of Work Keys curriculum/training material providers. A document listing materials that providers have matched to Work Keys skills is also available for a fee of $6.00. If interested, , call 800/WORK KEY (800/967-5539).

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For More Information About Work Keys

WORKKEYS Would you like more information about the Work Keys system? Just return this form to ACT and we'll be glad to contact you.

Please have a Work Keys Consultant contact me regarding:

- ☐ **Job profiling to determine skill needs.**
- ☐ **Work Keys assessments (indicate areas of interest).**
  - ☐ **Applied Mathematics** ☐ **Writing** ☐ **Locating Information** ☐ **Teamwork**
  - ☐ **Applied Technology** ☐ **Listening** ☐ **Reading for Information** ☐ **Observation**
- ☐ **Instructional support in the Work Keys skills areas.**
- ☐ **Put my name on the list for future Work Keys USA mailings.**

Name _____

Title _____ **Organization** _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **ZIP** _____

Telephone ( ) _____ **FAX ( )** _____

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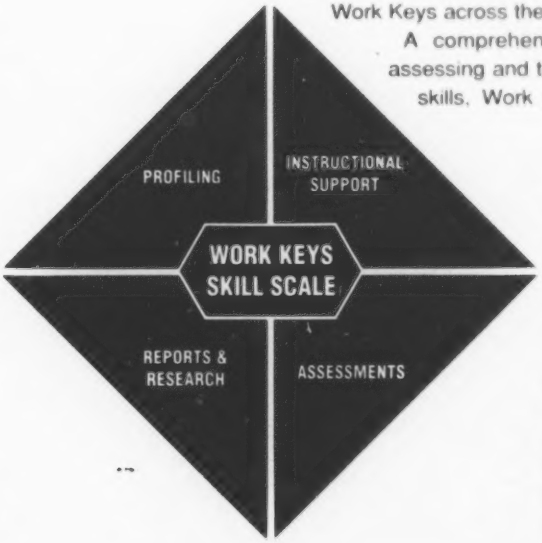
Work Keys Passes New Milestones

More than two million Work Keys assessments have now been administered. The magic number was passed some time in August, at about the same time the nation's 172nd Work Keys Service Center opened its doors and job profile number 2,243 was completed. The Work Keys system has now been used in 39 states.

These various numbers all add up to one big fact—that there's a great deal of interest in Work Keys across the nation.

A comprehensive program for assessing and teaching workplace skills, Work Keys provides a skill scale or "common language" that gives educators, learners, workers, and employers the means to establish meaningful standards and helps guide the development of workplace skills.

The newest addition to ACT's family of more than 100 programs and services for educators, learners, and businesses, Work Keys is the product of an intensive collaboration between ACT and selected members of the business community. Work Keys is designed to facilitate communication between business and education in order to help America build a stronger workforce, employers hire qualified employees, and individuals find rewarding careers. ■



The Work Keys system consists of four interrelated elements:

- **ASSESSMENTS that measure learners' workplace skills**
- **A JOB PROFILING SYSTEM that determines the levels of skills required for competent performance in specific jobs**
- **INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT that helps educators teach necessary skills**
- **A RESEARCH AND REPORTING SYSTEM that links assessment and job analysis data to offer timely and useful information to Work Keys participants**

In addition, an INFORMATION SERVICE provides job analyses, instruction, and other services—either directly from ACT or through a national network of Work Keys Service Centers.

Assessments in Applied Mathematics, Listening, Writing, Reading for Information, Applied Technology, Locating Information, Teamwork, and Observation are currently available.

ACT

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